

Moshe Bar-Asher

Leshonot Rishonim: Studies in the Language of the Bible, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and Aramaic. Jerusalem: The Hebrew University Magnes Press, 2012. Pp. 474. Hardback. IS\$ 43.00. ISBN 978-965-493-639-2.

This book includes thirty studies of Hebrew and Aramaic language in Bible and Dead Sea Scrolls, all written by Moshe Bar-Asher, a prominent scholar of Hebrew linguistics. The bulk of these articles has been published previously, frequently in *Leshonenu*, but two studies are new. These contributions represent Bar-Asher's broad erudition in matters related to Hebrew orthography and grammar: phonology as well as morphology and to a lesser extent syntax. Bar-Asher has chosen for a division into four major parts. Part One is devoted to Biblical Hebrew and includes seven chapters. The second part is called the language of the Dead Sea Scrolls and contains ten chapters. The five chapters in Part Three focus on apocryphal documents, including Chapter Nineteen which is an extensive study of the Gabriel Stone. This tablet with eighty-seven lines of partly legible Hebrew was discovered only fourteen years ago on the shores of the Dead Sea. Bar-Asher has much to add to previous publications and linguistic studies of this text, challenging the reading and interpretations of the editors Yardeni-Elizur as well as Israel Knohl. Finally, Part Four has eight chapters on a selection of Aramaic and Syriac issues, predominantly orthographical and morphological details.

Generally, Bar-Asher's studies present explanations of Hebrew and Aramaic vocabulary, but in other cases it is about larger subjects. Chapter One discusses biblical words which provide explanations for other words in connection to Targumim and Midrashim. The famous example is Gen 31:47-48 ("Laban called it Jegar Sahadutha, and Jacob called it Galeed"). Chapter Three is more specific: Bar-Asher discusses the appearances of the word *yedid* and examines its use and meaning, providing ample evidence that the word *yedid* underwent a gradual shift from passive to active, similar to English "beloved" and "lover." Chapter Five is a remarkable exception: Bar-Asher deals with the centerpiece of Jewish prayer, Deut 6:4, in a Greek transcription on an amulet which was found at the Jewish graveyard of Halbtum, a town in the eastern part of Austria near the Hungarian border. Although this amulet in a silver box is a recent finding from the year 2008, the Greek orthography (*Suma Istrael Adone Eloe Adone Ead*) leads to the early dating of the second or third century, when this part of Europe was a Roman settlement. In Bar-Asher's opinion, this discovery attests the presence of Jews in this region in the first centuries CE for whom the *Shema* verse had a crucial religious and liturgical meaning, offering an insight into the Hebrew pronunciation at the time. Chapter Seven is based on

a hitherto unpublished lecture from 2010 about Wilhelm Gesenius' renowned *Hebrew and Chaldean Lexicon* on the occasion of the bicentenary of its appearance. Bar-Asher offers valid comments on the status and relevance of this great work for renewed research into Rabbinic Hebrew. A second unpublished lecture (Chapter Four on lexical issues in Biblical Hebrew) has been inserted, although a similar version is published in the Jubilee Volume for Yehuda Liebes (Jerusalem 2012, pp. 443-55). This seems a little exaggerated, but otherwise Bar-Asher offers his readers a great overview of his lifelong pursuit of Hebrew linguistics and lexicography.

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